

Bill Rea ? Vacation woes

We all have to go through stressful times. They are just part of life.

I'm going through such a period right now. The tensions and stress started building up a couple of weeks ago, but I expect I'll start getting some relief sometime next week. At least that's what I hope will happen.

What has caused this lengthy ordeal that I have been enduring? Vacation time.

And just so the timelines are straight here, I'm currently holidaying in Muskoka, and I'm doing my best to endure it.

Being a workaholic, I confess that I don't do vacations very well. I haven't for many years. Fortunately, I think my wife is getting used to me, if anyone possibly could.

There was one year, early in our marriage, when we spent a couple of days somewhat north of Caledon. Our drive home had us passing the office, and I asked Beth's permission to stop briefly to see if there were any emails that required my immediate attention (this was before the time when I had a laptop on which I could access my work emails from anywhere with WiFi). Somewhat to my surprise, permission was granted.

She sat in the office while I worked away. It only took about 20 minutes, but it prompted a comment from Beth that I have never forgotten.

"This is the most relaxed I've seen you all week," she said.

Part of my vacation problems deal with the feelings of guilt that I have when I'm not on the job. I get the feeling I should be doing something productive. I should be out covering some event. I should be planning the next edition of the paper. I should be writing something. I spend so much of my time working, it's hard for me to get out of that routine. It is also a fact there's a certain amount of comfort contained in that routine. There have been people asking me to attend events to cover them while I'm away. I've had to extend regrets, because I will not be in town. It makes me feel like such a creep. We workaholics are like that.

There are times when I think I'm hopeless.

I've sometimes puzzled at how my father was able to handle down time so well. He spent a couple of years as an executive with a multinational corporation, and spent better than half his time in the late 1960s in Europe. And when he was home, there would be weekly trips to Detroit.

About 20 years later, for my first vacation on my own as a member of the workforce, I went to Ireland, and my folks drove me to the airport to see me off.

"Remember when we used to be out here just about every week?" my dad asked me, as I was waiting to be called to my flight.

"Yeah," I replied.

"I do not miss it," he said, emphasizing each and every syllable.

Yet he seemed to handle his vacation time so well. When I was a kid, we used to spend my old man's two weeks of vacation time (in those days, if you were in the private sector, that's all you got) fishing. As long as the fish were biting and a bottle of cold beer was within easy reach (laws governing the consumption of alcohol on the waterways were a lot more easy-going 50 years ago), he was content. And things weren't so bad even if the fish weren't biting, since he was spared the task of cleaning the fish; a task my dad never really enjoyed.

My father was able to chill out for vacations. I wish I knew how he did it.

I have a terrible time relaxing when I'm off the job.

And it's not just the going on vacation that stresses me. It's the time leading up to it, as I deal with what I will have to have in place for the time when I'm away. While I am gone for a week, the paper will still have to get out. Fortunately, I am able to do a couple of pages in advance, such as the page you're currently reading. Work started in that regard a couple of weeks ago. Indeed, I started writing this column Aug. 1. I know it was a holiday. So I worked on a statutory holiday. What else is new? I've had to do a lot of writing over the last couple of weeks; a lot more than is normal. I had to make sure there was enough material to fill the paper in my absence.

Fortunately, Angela Gismonde has been able to make herself available to deal with most of the production chores while I'm away.

Most of the production work is done Wednesday, since the paper goes to press later that day. I anticipate I'll spend much of that day on the phone with Angela. I'm sure I'll drive her up a wall.

I'll have my laptop with me too, meaning I'll be regularly checking my emails, like constantly.

And once I get back home, I will have to go through the ordeal getting back into the regular routine of work. I expect that will take a couple of days.

It's too bad, because I do enjoy getting away.

The place my wife and I are currently at (assuming you're reading this Thursday) is not too far from Port Carling. It's a place we visit frequently. It's got all the comforts of home. In fact, it has three TVs (we only have one at our house). The Olympics are on, so I plan to spend a lot of time watching them, at least when I'm not swimming (expertly, if I do say so myself ? I spent a bit of time as a lifeguard in my teens), golfing (badly, I assure you) or basically bumming around. The swimming facilities are great. There's even a pool if we get tired of swimming in Lake Joseph. There are several good restaurants just a couple of minutes drive away, so we are not likely to starve. There's also a barbecue, so I'm confident Beth is going to press me into service in that regard, especially since we are expecting that family is going to be joining us during this retreat.

The best part of the whole ordeal will come tomorrow (Friday) when we come home. The rules say we have to vacate the unit by 11 a.m., but we'll be out of them long before then. I'll have work to do. Besides, Beth just told me she'll have to make an appointment with her hair dresser Friday afternoon (there are certain priorities in life).

The CNE opens this week. The Rotary Club of Bolton are having their Ribfest this weekend (Beth and I are going to be eating lots of ribs). And the Belfountain Music Festival is wrapping up this weekend. As I alluded to earlier, I felt like a creep when I told them I wouldn't be around for the first couple of concerts.

Now that I'm back from vacation, I have a certain amount of making up to do.

I hope I had a good time.

